
INCLUDES NEW SPECIAL SECTION ON **PRAYER** (Page 13)

TIDINGS

Volume 86, Number 2, February, 2023

TEAR DOWN OR BUILD?

You can be a better builder when you recognize
that you also need help from others.



Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

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EDITORIAL



TEAR DOWN OR BUILD?

By Dave Jennings



THE phrase, edify or edification, is used exclusively by the Apostle Paul in Scripture. It carries the concept of building, either physically (like a house) or as a metaphor for promoting spiritual growth. In all cases, it is a positive term. Paul was extraordinarily focused on building faith in individuals and ecclesias. He had no interest in activities that weren't positive or directed at helping new and existing believers to become stronger in their faith. Even his own authority as an apostle was given strictly for building, never for tearing down.

This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down. (2 Cor 13:10 NIV).

Paul would literally do anything for the benefit of others. This included an incredible flexibility that he demonstrated by adapting his style and words to the appropriate audience.

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law. (1 Cor 9:19-21).

While Paul was fully committed to building and encouraging, he must have found it deeply discouraging to see behaviors that undermined faith. The same brothers and sisters Paul had labored over and rejoiced with when they accepted the true gospel had their faith shipwrecked when others forced their view of life in the truth on them. This is the antithesis of edification. It is similar to Job's complaint about his three companions when he said,

People who are at ease mock those in trouble. They give a push to people who are stumbling. (Job 12:5 NLT).

Examples in the Book of Job

Job is a dramatic case study of what happens when those in one's community of faith become the greatest source of upset. Not one of his companions offered a single word of comfort or edification. Rather, their words were like the gnashing of sharp teeth. They refused to hear him. They were intent on forcing their erroneous view of God on this suffering man. They asserted essentially: "This happened to you (Job) because you have sinned, and you are now receiving the just reward of your wickedness. You didn't aid the fatherless and widows; you didn't clothe the naked or feed the hungry (all untruths). God is exacting on you much less than your iniquity deserves (Job 11:6)." They escalated their criticism of this suffering man, even as they saw him in tears. But perhaps the deepest hurt to Job was knowing that no matter how genuine his heart was, their thoughts and devices would

“wrongfully imagine against me.” (Job 21:27). Beyond the actual words spoken, Job knew these companions saw no good in him. They were his persecutors, though they thought of themselves as his friends. (Job 19:22).

The standard for all ecclesial life is edification—building up. This may be accomplished in many ways, but it collapses when criticism, harshness, and condemnation occur.

We are progressively seeing the opposite of edification being modeled in our society. Many people demonize different points of view and sort individuals into separate camps. Soon there is nothing positive to be said about the neighbor living next door because he supports a different cause or policy. Name-calling and defamatory statements about another person’s actions or motives are frequently made, generally without any recourse. Some are more interested in tearing down and diminishing their opponent than looking for common ground.

This must never be a description of our lives in ecclesias. I see no permission in Scripture for any of us to negatively label one another or ascribe malicious intent to another’s motives. This is not only useless behavior but also destructive.

Sadly, I do hear labels being applied to brothers and sisters. Maybe they are too conservative or too liberal. Their practices are labeled as being akin to Humanism. They are callous and unforgiving. They are loveless. They throw away God’s commands to accept

any convenient behavior. They are called worldly.

None of these labels are edifying. They all miss the fundamental point of edification—to build up. Encouragement was never intended to be exclusively for our dearest friends in the truth, or even those who are closely aligned with our point of view. It is intended for all, even those who see issues quite differently from us.

Paul Provided the Standard for our Lips.

Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but if there is any good word for edification according to the need of the moment, say that, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Eph 4:29 NASB).

Maybe you have considered the above passage to be addressing the use of foul language, which certainly has no place

in our lives either. But the context of this passage is about how we are to be “angry, and sin not.” (v. 26). “To neither give place to the devil.” (v. 27). The context of the entire chapter is about putting away “all bitterness, and

wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking.” (v. 31). For believers, there is not to be malice. Still, rather we are to be “kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” (vv. 32). The “unwholesome words” being spoken of here represent the opposite of edification. Whenever we negatively describe a fellow believer, we invite unhealthy and destructive words to issue from our mouths. Instead, Paul’s

The standard
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instruction is to choose “*any good word for edification according to the need of the moment.*” Certainly, we wouldn’t use expletives or foul language to describe one another. We need to have the same level of circumspection about bitterness, envy, wrath, and anger, all of which are unwholesome and evil.

Job’s companions would have been better served by embracing God’s divine perception of him. God chose to see the good in Job as “*blameless and upright.*” (Job 1:1 ESV). In fact, Job’s companions would have been better served by continuing to sit quietly with Job in the dust and keeping their mouths shut. This is a good directive when our thoughts are not edifying to others.

Offering Correction is Edification

One might wrongly conclude that edification prohibits judgment and correction but that is a false notion of how correction is described in Scripture. We are to judge **observable** behaviors, not motives or intents of the

heart. God will hold us accountable if we turn our heads away from a brother or sister who is swallowed up in a sin. Correction and godly rebuke express our love and care for one another. The fact is that godly rebuke is edification.

This is a principle stated clearly in the Law.

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD. Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. (Lev 19:15-17 NIV).

The idea here is to offer correction, building up and encouraging your brother or sister to repent and return to righteous living. This is not judicial judgment but the pastoral care we have for each other in a loving community. Jude further describes this:

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference [ESV “and have mercy on those who doubt”]: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. (Jude 20-23).

The standard for proper rebuke and correction is a form of very personal edification. At times, it involves bearing with and having compassion (Job’s companions would have done well with this strategy). This is similar to the compassion to be shown by the high priest, “*He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.*” (Heb 5:2 ESV). When the adulterous woman was brought for judgment before the Lord, his assurance and correction was, “*Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.*” (John 8:11). When we see our role clearly about edification, our compliments, as well as our rebuke, are firmly rooted in building up and encouraging.

Be a Better Builder

When God, in His infinite wisdom, designed ecclesias for worship, it was with a full acknowledgment that diversity of thought and backgrounds would bring about conflict. In our ecclesial life, there is no centralized authority or human mandate to decide right or wrong. Each of us is expected to contribute to the ecclesial organism. We are all to be builders. Because the ecclesia is made up of fragile men and

women struggling with their faith lives, there is a great opportunity to help one another. You can be a better builder when you, too, realize your need for help. When I see a brother struggling, I accept that I have my own struggles and am no better.

Paul spoke about the comfort we receive from our God and how we can be comforters to one another.

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. (2 Cor 1:3-7 NLT).

So, the next time you are exasperated with a brother or sister, the next time you clash on what you think is an important issue, remember this counsel. It is an opportunity to feed our flesh for self-justification or to demonstrate the same kind of comfort we regularly receive from our God. The choice is as simple as that: Tear down or build?

Dave Jennings

EATING AND DRINKING IN AN UNWORTHY MANNER

By Nathan Badger

SEVERAL years ago, a dear brother asked me my interpretation of the Apostle Paul's warning about eating the bread or drinking the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner (1 Cor 11:27). Have you ever wondered the same? Perhaps it troubles you on Sunday mornings, as it has me.

In this article, we will explore Paul's warning and its practical application. The solution to this heart-searching caution is contained in the very context of 1 Corinthians 11 but may be clouded by our familiarity with the account of the Lord's Supper. The solution is also

a remedy to division and spiritual sickness in our personal lives, our ecclesias and Christ's worldwide body.

The Bread and Wine

To understand Paul's warning, we must first understand the simple meaning of the Bread and Wine. He recounts the Lord's Supper and the shared emblems in 1 Cor 11:24-25. They form the foundation to Paul's caution: "*Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.*" (1 Cor 11:27). He repeats this caution several verses later when


he observes *“For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”* (1 Cor 11:29).

What do these symbols mean? Jesus explains the bread when he says, *“This is my body, which is **given** for you.”* (Luke 22:19). When we share the bread, this simple symbol reminds us that the Lord walked this earth in a physical body **given** to us for three and a half years. In that body, he **gave** himself to teach, to heal the sick, and to rebuke the proud and hypocritical in Jerusalem. His body was **given** as an example, in word and deed, of God's principles, parables, morals, and thoughts. A body that was **given** for you and me, was beaten with stripes, hung on a cross, buried in a grave and was raised again. That is quite a body to be inspired by and to live after! When we reflect on Christ's body on Sunday morning it reminds us of every ounce of Jesus' time, energy and emotion completely **given**, dedicated and offered in service and obedience to God.

Jesus explains the cup of wine when he says, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”* (Luke 22:20). When we share the cup and its wine, this symbol is a metaphor of a life shed, or given for us. It reminds

us of his life, which was **given** up to persecution and rejection and ended in **giving** his blood. His body was scourged with whips and punctured with a crown of thorns causing him to give up his own blood. His arms and legs were pierced by nails and a spear pierced his side bringing forth blood and water. He endured mocking, rejection, loss, grief, false accusations, and great anxiety, whereby his *“sweat became like great drops of blood.”* (Luke 22:44). The giving of Christ's blood is something to be inspired by and to live after! Leviticus 17:11 declares, *“The life of the flesh is in the blood.”* This reference helps us realize that Jesus gave everything for us, including his very life. When we reflect on Christ's blood on Sunday morning, it reminds us of the most incredible sacrifice ever **given** and one that offers us life also.

From Paul's cautions, I think we can all agree that to partake of the emblems we share on Sunday morning in an unworthy manner is very serious, and the consequences are severe. At the very least, do we understand what they mean and pause to reflect on how the emblems symbolize Christ's life? More importantly, do they inspire us to live as he did and to offer thanks for the covering of our sins made possible through his sacrifice?



The giving of Christ's blood is something to be inspired by and to live after!

Divisions, Self-Centeredness and Self-Righteousness

However, eating and drinking in an unworthy manner involves more than just misunderstanding the bread and the wine. The context of 1 Corinthians 11 provides us with some clues. In verses 17-19, Paul observes of the Corinthian ecclesia, *“When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.”* (v. 17). The NIV translates this bluntly: *“Your meetings do more harm than good.”* What was so harmful about them? Paul explains in the next verses: *“I hear that there are divisions [and] ...factions among you.”* (vv.18-19) Rather than coming together as one tightly-knit group of brethren and sisters in both form and substance, they were a jumbled and disjointed mess of believers.

If that was not enough, Paul observes, *“When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else.”* (1 Cor 11:20-21 NIV). The phrase *“goes ahead without waiting,”* means to rush in or to overtake. Believers were coming to the memorial service, and instead of sharing the Lord’s Supper as an intimate communal meal and as a unified group, they focused on devouring their personal meal. Some were without food and went hungry, while others were drunken (v. 21). The Corinthians were more concerned with taking care of themselves first than sharing the Lord’s Supper or ensuring that others were included. Imagine that! Brothers and Sisters were out for themselves on Sunday morning. An

attitude of taking, taking, taking, and “me first” pervaded the memorials.

In verse 22, their behavior led Paul to conclude that they *“despise”* and *“humiliate”* the ecclesia of God. The Greek words mean they were looking down on others and disgracing them. Their treatment of each other was shocking and similar to the problems Paul identified in chapter one, where it seems some had divided themselves based on a “holier than thou” attitude (1 Cor 1:10-12) and possibly wealth, education and race (vv. 19-24).

In this context of division, self-centeredness, and self-righteousness, Paul refocuses the minds of the ecclesia on the contrasting behavior of Christ, as symbolized in the bread and wine. While the ecclesia was dividing and taking, Jesus’s example was one of bringing together and humbly giving of self. After sharing these emblems with his disciples, Jesus demonstrated their practical application. He took a towel, wrapped it around his waist and washed his disciple’s feet (John 13:5). He brought them together, **gave** himself as a servant and demonstrated that behavior for us to imitate among each other.

In this context, Paul cautions about eating and drinking unworthily. To cause division, to focus on self, or to elevate self during the memorials, let alone outside the memorials, is to eat and drink in an unworthy manner. This behavior is diametrically opposed to the significance of the Bread and Wine we share and to the servant example of Christ, who we come to remember and be inspired by!

The Brothers and Sisters in Corinth were not very considerate of each other. Surely, it left many feeling devalued and sidelined at the Lord's Supper. It is worth asking ourselves whether our lives coincide with Corinth's or Christ's. Is ecclesial life or the memorial service all about us? Are we sidelining others? Are we absorbed in our rules, our quirks, our interpretations, our hymns, or our own status? Do we view ourselves as holier than others in the ecclesia or the community and disesteem them? Would we refuse to share the emblems with other believers because we are focused on preserving ourselves? If we are, then perhaps we need to consider whether we are eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

Do This

In 1 Cor 11:24, Paul approaches eating and drinking unworthily from a different angle. He captures a short phrase from the Lord Jesus when he recounts, "*This is my body, which is [given] for you. **Do this** in remembrance of me.*" He repeats this phrase in verse 25 when he says, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood. **Do this**, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.*"

What does the phrase "**do this**" mean? By familiarity, we may interpret it to mean chew bread and sip wine to remember Jesus. However, it can't possibly have this meaning. Otherwise, Jesus' words should read as follows, "Drink the wine as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." Obviously, this does not make sense, and Christ means more by this phrase.

Instead, Jesus is encouraging us to **do the actions** that are symbolized in the

Bread and Wine, as a way of honoring and following him every week. In other words, he encourages us to give up our bodies to do the same things that he did. We are to pour out the blood of our lives in service to him and our fellow believers—even to death if necessary. He urges us not to just eat the Bread and drink the Wine. "Go and **do** what I did. Put these symbols into practical application."

Jesus reinforces this instruction in the upper room where he teaches the disciples, "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that **you also should do** just as **I have done** to you.*" (John 13:14-15). Jesus leaves us with no doubt that doing this means giving our lives to our Brothers, Sisters, and God. These actions are far more meaningful than ritually chewing bread and sipping wine on Sunday morning.

The overriding message of Paul, and Christ, is that the emblems are only a means to an end, much like sacrifices under the Law. They are not the end. They are the beginning. When we share bread and wine, we are encouraged to put them into action and **do** them. If we are not doing this, perhaps we are eating and drinking unworthily.

Not Discerning the Lord's Body

Concisely, what does Paul mean when he warns about eating the bread and drinking the cup in an unworthy manner? He means that we eat and drink these symbols and then fail to let the bread and wine have any practical impact on our lives, particularly in our relations with each other. Have you

ever done that? Have you ever eaten and drunk without giving a thought to what it really means in your life? I know I have, many times. Moreover, I suspect we all have.

Paul shares a further example in 1 Corinthians 11 to illustrate this warning. In verse 29 he says, “*For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the [Lord’s] body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*” Paul’s

together with love. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul explains that sharing bread and wine is not just participating in Christ’s personal body. It is also a communion with and recognition of his worldwide body: “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake*

In its fullest sense, the body of Christ is everyone that God has called to be part of his body—a decision that is His, and not ours!

point is that we judge ourselves or “*bring damnation on ourselves*” (KJV) if we fail to recognize or evaluate the Lord’s body.

But what is “*the body*” (ESV) or the “*Lord’s body*” (KJV)? And how do we discern it? Is he talking about Christ’s physical body? Yes, in a certain sense, he is because Christ’s body is represented in the emblems. However, I believe there is greater depth to Paul’s words. In its fullest sense, he encourages us to recognize or distinguish the whole body of Christ worldwide. In other words, he exhorts us to recognize, think about, and appreciate all the various parts that have been integrated into the Lord’s body, in addition to Christ, who is the head (1 Cor 12:12, 27; Eph 4:15, 16).

The body is a key theme in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 emphasize the body of Christ as a worldwide organism, made up of many parts, unified in diversity and glued

of the one bread.” (vv. 16-17). Paul emphasizes that when we break Bread and drink Wine, we must recognize and consider Christ’s body of believers worldwide—not just his physical body, and not just the brother or sister beside us. Christ’s body extends well beyond our home ecclesia and those ecclesias we may align with on difficult topics. In its fullest sense, the body of Christ is everyone that God has called to be part of his body—a decision that is His, and not ours!

Paul’s warning should cause us to be introspective and evaluate whether we recognize, include and treat the whole body of Christ in the same way that our Lord did. We fail to discern the Lord’s body (worldwide) if we ignore or disesteem parts of Christ’s body that he has set in place as it pleased him (1 Cor 12:18). If we fail to grasp this, and put it into practice, then we may be eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

Wait For One Another

Paul closes his reflections on the Lord's Supper with a touching imperative: *"So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another."* (1 Cor 11:33).

What does Paul mean, *"Wait for one another"*? Does he mean standing around and chatting for a few minutes before heading home or ensuring everyone has enough to eat? Although both behaviors are up-building in our fellowship together, this word means much more. The Greek word is *ekdechomai*, and is composed of two parts. *"Ek"* means the point from which something emanates, while *"dechomai"* means to take into one's arms or family and to embrace or hold.

Therefore, this word means to go up to our Brother or Sister, give them a hug, pull them into ourselves, or share love, care and concern for them from our hearts. This type of waiting should emanate from each of us as we discern and show care for the Lord's body. In addition, this kind of waiting and giving keep a body glued together and healthy. In the context of Paul's cautions, it is also the kind of waiting that helps us avoid eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

Weak And Sick?

In 1 Corinthians 11:28, Paul encourages us to *"examine ourselves"* as we share the emblems on Sunday morning. Unfortunately, we may use this verse as a reason to dig up our past sins, guilt ourselves over our mistakes, demoralize our spirit, and even impede our ability to rise above our human weaknesses.

Certainly, it is important to evaluate the mistakes we have made so that we can correct them. However, neither Paul nor Christ instructed us to overwhelm ourselves with our sins while sharing the emblems. Surprisingly, there is no mention of sin anywhere in 1 Corinthians 11 or the Lord's Supper.

Instead, Paul asks us to focus on Christ and his worldwide body by sharing the Bread and Wine together. We are to appreciate and be inspired by Christ's life, death and resurrection. His remembrance should reinvigorate us to love, care for, and embrace individuals that Christ has called to be his brothers and sisters. If we follow his example of obedience, and give selflessly, esteem others better than ourselves, discern the Lord's body and wait for one another (in their fullest sense), we should have no need to worry whether we are eating and drinking in an unworthy manner. Furthermore, we will avoid the tragic state of the members of the Corinthian Ecclesia, who were fractious, self-absorbed, and self-righteous. And, *"For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep."* (1 Cor 11:30 NKJV).

Next Sunday, as we share the emblems worldwide, let us be inspired by the body and blood the Lord Jesus gave for us, and then proceed to **do** these emblems! When the meeting has ended, and after we have examined our love for Christ, let's stand up, put the emblems into action, seek out our Brothers and Sisters, embrace them in our arms, and **give** to them as our Lord did to us.

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¹ All passages are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT WE OUGHT TO PRAY FOR

By Darren Tappouras



WE would all like to know how to pray better.

It appears that very few of us are satisfied with our prayer life and our personal commitment to prayer.

I number among my friends, some of whom are considered prominent Bible students in our community, who teach at Bible Schools and Conferences, yet they sometimes confide in quiet conversation about their inadequacy when it comes to prayer.

In most books I have read on prayer, the authors, many of them spiritual giants, will also admit to this inadequacy and

take care to emphasize they are not experts, nor have they mastered the subject themselves.

“In speaking about prayer, I should not like you to think that I am posing as an expert.”¹

“It is because the writer is deeply conscious of the many problems which surround the subject of prayer.”²

“Personal conversations reveal that there is an almost universal dissatisfaction regarding one’s own prayers.”³

“One writes about prayer with a reluctance which springs from a sense of inadequacy.”⁴

Why is This?

I humbly propose a suggestion that may account for at least some of the inadequacy felt. I detect significant confusion about this subject, particularly concerning petitionary prayer,⁵ and its interaction with God’s providence.

I feel (speaking mainly for myself) we are confused about what to expect from prayer and what God offers through prayer. In our community, we receive many mixed messages regarding prayer. In some quarters, our language can reflect the theology of Calvinism, which posits that everything that happens is a result of a divine plan and that God is consciously and purposely involved in every event. In other parts of the community, it is held that God only interacts with us through His written Word and only uses external agents, such as angels or weather events, to bring about His will.

With such a range of different and inconsistent perspectives, it can be hard to formulate and confidently hold a consistent personal view. Also, our personal experience of prayers being answered or not being answered adds to the confusion.

Having been baptized for over 35 years, I have gone to God in sincere

and earnest prayer on many occasions and not had my prayer answered. If I am being honest, I would have to say that the majority of my most serious and heartfelt prayers have not been answered.

How many friends with cancer have I tearfully prayed for, who have lost the battle and died, sometimes leaving behind young families bereft and shattered? How many accident victims have I prayed for who have not recovered? How many friends who have left the faith have I prayed for who remain lost? How many faltering marriages have I asked God to intervene in, yet they ended in divorce nonetheless? The list could go on.

Trite and superficial answers such as “It was God’s will,” “We cannot understand God’s reasons,” or “God was teaching us all a lesson” were unsatisfying and, for me, only added to the confusion I felt.

An Unsatisfying Solution

Because of such experiences, some have taken a subjective-only approach the prayer.

They suggest prayer doesn’t really cause God to intervene, but it is still highly beneficial for us. When we come to God in prayer, we have our perspectives aligned with God’s. Our minds are recalibrated by the very action and words of our prayer, and we learn to trust in God and take comfort from the prayer experience.

I would have to say that the majority of my most serious and heartfelt prayers have not been answered.

Now, I strongly believe that prayer involves a very significant subjective power. However, the promises regarding prayer in the Scriptures appear far more effective and substantial than just these subjective benefits.

Bro. Dennis Gillett makes some very relevant observations regarding subjective-only prayer. He begins by saying: “What you think about prayer will decide whether you pray and how you pray” (Gillett, 2015). He goes on to say,

“There are those who affirm sincerely that the sole purpose of prayer is subjective—that is, its object is to change those who pray. Now whilst I have the deepest respect for those who sincerely hold this view of prayer, I am obliged to say that I think it to be utterly wrong, and in a sense a theory which is self-destructive.”⁶

His own observation is that those who hold this view eventually find their motivation to pray diminished and often give up praying altogether; “The subjective value and effect of prayer arises out of a conviction that when men speak to God, He hears and answers their prayer.”

God’s Extravagant Prayer Promises

As much as we may respect the honesty and self-awareness of those who seek only personal benefits as a way of responding to the unanswered prayer phenomenon, we, too, find it to be an unsatisfactory interpretation of some particular and extravagant offers by God found in His word.

Prayer Guarantees

Throughout the New Testament, believers are given very specific promises relating to their prayers being answered. Some well-known ones include:

- “*Whatever we ask we receive from him.*” (1 John 3:22).
- “*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*” (1 John 5:14-15).
- “*Whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*” (John 15:7).
- “*Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*” (John 14:13-14).
- “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*” (Matt 7:7-8, Luke 11:9).

Several related verses seem to indicate that because of our faith, we should be able to achieve amazing physical feats based on God’s response to our prayers:

Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore, I

tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:23-24, see Luke 17:6 and Matt 7:20).

The Usual Responses

How can we reconcile these conflicting realities?

On one hand, it appears that Scripture is obvious; God will answer our prayers. On the other hand, our life experiences contain many personal examples (sometimes quite painful) that demonstrate this is not always the case.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS:

The Answer Could be NO!

One attempt to resolve this contradiction is to say that God always answers our prayers as the verses state; it's just that His answer may be no!

The reality is that this solution cannot be forced upon the passages quoted. The “no” answer cannot really be inserted into the context, syntax, and grammar of the verses themselves. I will demonstrate with two examples, but they hold for all the passages in question.

For example, consider the text from Luke 11:9-11 below, and see if you can insert a “no” into the structure or if the context allows for a “no” to be implied in any way.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?

Also, consider this verse from John 14:13-14, and see if a “no” answer can be implied in the text.

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

This verse simply says, ask and I will do it—a “no” answer cannot be forced into the context. See also John 15:7, “*Whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*” Note the far-reaching and unqualified word “*whatever*” used here. This prayer promise is clear and positive and does not appear to anticipate or allow a “no” answer. We can repeat the analysis on passages such as 1 John 5:15 and John 3:22. A “no” answer doesn’t appear to be a satisfactory or satisfying solution.

According To His Will

Another attempt to answer this contradiction comes by focusing on some of these verses that align the answer of prayer with the will of God, as seen in 1 John 5:14-16, in “*according to His will.*”

This line of reasoning says that we can be confident that our prayers will only be answered if it is according to God’s will. The implication is that it may not have been God’s will (in His infinite wisdom) for a particular person to recover from a serious injury. Therefore, the prayers for their recovery were not answered.

We note several difficulties with this view. Firstly, 1 John 5:14 says that we can have “*confidence*” that our prayers will be answered. How is this possible, as we do not know whether our prayer is in accordance with His will?

This point of view also appears to be a convenient excuse. By way of illustration, imagine I am the manager of a company, and on several occasions I made great pronouncements, both in person and in print, that if any employee wanted anything to help them in their role, I would give it to them. After repeating this offer many times, an employee finally comes to me and asks for a new calculator. I respond, “no!” The employee rightly reminds me of my generous pronouncement, and I respond that I will only give them their request if it is by my will, and it is not my will to give them a new calculator. My pronouncement seems hollow and unhelpful now. One could not have any confidence in my offers and certainly could not rely on them. Secondly, we may be reading something into the word “will” (Greek: *thelema*) that is not intended in this context. God’s will can be understood differently:

1. Purpose-will (or purposive will).

This is a deliberate choice by God to do or not do something. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:1, “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle.”

You can see how in this verse, it is God’s deliberate will and therefore, He acted accordingly to call Paul an apostle.

We could apply this usage by proposing an illustration in which we have two sisters who both have cancer. By relying on this usage, we could hypothetically say that it is God’s will for one (Sister A) to recover, and it is His will that the other (Sister B) will not. Therefore, prayer for Sister B will not be answered.

2. Precept-will (or preceptive will).

This is what God would desire to be or relates to His principles. For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:18–*“Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God.”* It may also include God’s will in a particular dispensation--e.g., it is not God’s will that the Holy Spirit gift of tongues be available today.

This usage would dictate that God will only answer a prayer that follows His principles and is compliant with his dispensational purpose.

So which usage of the word “will” best suits the prayer promises passages, such as 1 John 5:14-16?

Firstly, one tool to help us decide is to see the number of times the word is used in these two ways within the New Testament. By far and away, the word is used in the

second sense—God’s precept-will (62 times out of 67, or 92%).

Secondly, which usage actually fits the context of 1 John 5:15-16. The fact that we are to take “*confidence*” that our prayers are answered would favor the precept-will usage. No one could have any confidence based on the purpose-will unless they knew the very mind of God.

We conclude that the qualifier “*will of God*” is not an individual plan that God has with a certain individual or specific circumstance but rather emphasizes the fact that God will not answer a prayer that goes against His principles (e.g., asking a brother to suffer because he has hurt us, asking God to override someone’s freewill, or asking God to do something not available to His people in this dispensation).

What Have We Covered?

1. All of us (even some leading Bible students) admit to finding prayer challenging.
2. This may be partly because of confusion and mixed messages about prayer in our community.
3. God has given us very generous and extravagant promises (guarantees) to answer our prayers.

4. Our personal prayer experience does not always reflect these guarantees.

5. These guarantees do not allow prayer to be answered by “no.”

6. These guarantees appear to qualify only because God will not compromise His principles in answering our prayers.

How do we make sense of all this? How do we reconcile God’s extravagant prayer guarantees with our experienced reality?

The answers to these questions guide us on a journey to unlock where and how God works in our lives. They may lead to a renewed and powerful motivation to soak our lives in prayer and confidence in God.

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¹ Gillett, Dennis, *Speaking to the Heart*, The Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association, 2015.

² Tennant, Cyril, *Prayer Studies in Practice*, The Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association 1971.

³ Whittaker, Harry, *Reformation*, Biblia, Warwick, UK, (1985).

⁴ Purkis, Melva, *Prayer Studies in Principle and Practice*, The Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association 1971.

⁵ Prayers that ask for a specific request from God.

⁶ Ibid, Gillett, Dennis, *Speaking to the Heart*.

SUPPORT

By Paul Zilmer

THE second letter of Paul to Timothy is his final letter, at least the last one preserved for us. Paul is in prison in Rome for the second time; this time, he knows he will be convicted and executed. (2 Tim 1:12; 2:9; 4:6-8) He has been abandoned by most of his helpers and even actively opposed by some who should have supported him. (1:15; 4:10-16) The only one left lending him succor is Luke.

It's easy to treat the "heroes" of scripture as caricatures, two-dimensional cardboard cutouts, and words on a page without human depth. We take it for granted that, **of course**, the prophets and apostles would endure and would keep on serving faithfully. It's easy to think of them as some kind of giants beyond anything we could be. However, in reality, they had weaknesses, internal anguish, self-doubt, fear, and pain.

They had times when they didn't **want** to carry on. They were, in fact, just like any of us. In Paul's words to Timothy, we get a glimpse of how alone he felt. "*Do your best to come to me soon,*" he writes. (4:9). It's a heartfelt plea. Moreover, "*Get Mark and bring him with you.*" (4:11). Paul needs help and support.

We may miss what he's asking of Timothy and Mark. In chapter one, after mentioning those who had turned away, he writes,

May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus. (1:16-18).

Onesiphorus of Ephesus was terrifically loyal, going far out of his way to find and give aid to Paul, but Paul speaks of him as possibly being in the past tense. He prays for the Lord's mercy on this brother's family. He prays that this loving brother will find mercy "*on that Day*"—surely meaning the day of the Lord's appearing and the resurrection. What has happened? When Paul is closing his letter, he asks Timothy to greet the *household* of Onesiphorus—not the brother himself. (4:19).

The conclusion seems pretty clear. This brother left a family behind to seek out

and aid Paul in Rome. It appears he may have died as a result. It is the time of Nero's Rome, remember? The emperor has fixed blame for the great fire on the Christians and has begun a vicious, deadly campaign of extermination, trying to deflect responsibility from himself. We can't know for sure, but it looks like Onesiphorus was among the many believers slaughtered by this tyrant.

No wonder people are running away! But what does Paul ask? He asks Timothy and Mark to come to Rome. He is quite literally asking them to put their lives on the line.

Why would he do this? I think the answer may be in 1 Timothy 4:17. Paul used the forum granted him to make his defense, not to defend himself, but that "*through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.*" This preaching is what

he did every time he was on trial, as we read in the Acts. Being a Roman citizen gave him the right to defend himself, and he turned every occasion into an opportunity to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus and the salvation Jesus made possible. Why invite Timothy and Mark into danger? He was lonely, yes, but the big thing is that there's an

opportunity to preach! Note that Mark is singled out because he is so "*useful in the ministry.*" (4:11).

Looked at this way, other exhortations in Paul's letter take on an expanded dimension. Take a look at 1:6-8, 2:3-9,

**Onesiphorus
left a family
behind to seek
out and aid
Paul in Rome.
It appears he
may have died
as a result.**


2:24-26, 3:10-17, and especially 4:1-2, 5. Outreach isn't **all** Paul exhorts Timothy about—there's a great deal more. But the courage to preach and teach, even in the face of suffering for it, is a repeated and strongly emphasized part of the message to Timothy.

And, of course, the message applies to us! There are today some who face persecution and even death for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. For most of us, we might face ridicule. We might be passed over for a promotion at work and maybe lose a job. Family relationships and friendships might

be ruptured. Any of these things can mean real pain, even if they are not life-threatening. So, Paul's exhortations **do** apply to us.

No less than Timothy and Mark, he's asking us to come and join him—so that the Message might be fully proclaimed. Even if we feel we can't possibly be a Paul, we can surely be among those who lend support—be a Luke, a Timothy, a Mark, and perhaps if it's God's will, an Onesiphorus. Can't we?

*Paul Zilmer,
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*Even if we feel we can't possibly be a Paul,
we can surely be among those who lend
support—be a Luke, a Timothy, a Mark, and
perhaps if it's God's will, an Onesiphorus.*

A REVIEW OF *IN HIS FOOTSTEPS*

A MUSICAL MEDIA PRODUCTION
FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

By Jessica Gelineau

ONE step, two steps, three steps, four steps, we will walk in Jesus' footsteps. The song trails around my home as my four-and-a-half-year-old daughter has it stuck in her head. She's a musical girl, and a little game she has devised is one where she hums the opening song from one of her favorite TV shows, and I have to guess which one it is. There are only about five in the rotation, so it is a fairly easy game for me to succeed at!

I'm sure my contemporary parents of young children will all relate to the "screen time" conversation: how much? At what age? What content? At what expense? This is a vast subject and one I'm not really about to dive into right

here and right now. My husband and I do allow our young daughter to watch some television in our living room, usually at a set time each day, and choose trusted shows that we hope will inspire good things in her life, such as imaginative play, knowledge of nature, positive family relationships and friendships. Some other readers may take a similar approach. But regardless of your ideals or practices, if you have young children in your life—in any capacity—you can easily appreciate the interest and allure of media in their lives!

My daughter has a new favorite TV show in rotation now, and I couldn't be more pleased with the content!

In His Footsteps is a production of the Christadelphian Sunday School Association (CSSA), with three seasons currently available to stream and more on the way. With a mission of bringing the Scriptures to life for young children, I would love to see this show become a household name in Christadelphian homes with young children just as much as, say, Bluey or Sesame Street!

Here's the official show description:

"In His Footsteps is a fun, interactive Bible-based show for children! Each episode features a different Bible story, taking young viewers on a journey starting with the creation story in Genesis right through to stories from the life of Jesus. Through entertaining storytelling, children will learn lessons for everyday living. Each episode includes original songs, craft activities and a special appearance by Albert and his adorable puppet friends, Sam B and Sam G."



A promotional photo for the show, picturing Bro. Mike Steele as Albert, with his puppet companions and presenters Sis. Aletheia Burney and Bro. Luke Jurevicius.

I was able to have a conversation with Sis. Aletheia Burney about some of what goes on behind the scenes of *In His Footsteps*. Sis. Aletheia, along with Bro. Luke Jurevicius is one of the main presenters for the show. Before our chat, I had already been quite impressed with the production quality and thought, talent, and resources harnessed by this project. Due to the risk of leaving out important contributors, I will not attempt to credit every single individual involved. However, it is plain to see, even from simply viewing the show credits, that over twenty people dedicated significant time and energy to this project, most of them volunteers.

Regarding the original music in the show alone, a minimum of two new songs appears in each episode (not including the lovely jingle that this article begins with!) As a starting point, Bro. Stuart Gilmore, the show's producer and script editor, sets out some basic lyrics for each song. After all, the songs must fit in harmoniously

with the overall scripts to tell the story at hand and teach a related spiritual lesson. While the first season leaned heavily on the same two songwriters, subsequent seasons have involved many more songwriters of various ages and backgrounds, hailing from several different countries and employing a variety of musical styles. Sis. Aletheia and Bro.

Luke record most of the music, while Bro. Timon Burney is responsible for much of the music production, including instrumentation, mixing, and mastering.



A behind the scenes still from S2 Ep. 17: Joshua of Luke, Bro. Jonathan Penn, and Sis. Aletheia having some fun filming with brass instruments!

Sis. Aletheia and I discussed with some moms of young children several ways that *In His Footsteps* is currently being used in Christadelphian circles and beyond. Here are just a few ideas. Episodes can be watched during Sunday School periods (what a great resource for last-minute Sunday School teacher substitutes, as well! I'm keeping this in my back pocket.) Crafts can be made during Sunday School or as part of Vacation Bible School programs. Episodes or parts of episodes can be played at Christadelphian Heritage Schools. Grandparents or caregivers who watch children regularly while parents are working can play the show during their childcare shifts. The list could go on.

The episodes are clearly titled with the names of familiar Bible stories and are easy to search for resources if you're looking to teach children about a specific story. However, it's

just as enjoyable to watch through the episodes from beginning to end as a series.

Perhaps one of the greatest merits of the show is the capacity to provoke meaningful spiritual connections between parents or caregivers and children. Young children are the target audience, and much thought and care have gone into the lessons.

As one parent shared with

Sis. Aletheia, "The more I listened to the music in the car and in the house, I would find myself able to pull out concepts to talk to my kids about." Because the songs are so accessible and learnable by young children, they help children employ their emotional intelligence in the context of Bible stories. Whereas a four or five-year-old child might not fully grasp the emotional implications of an account



A still of the craft time from S1 Ep. 10: Joseph in Egypt. Sis. Olivia Yearsley (left) and Sis. Julia Jurevicius (right) teach a lesson-related craft in each episode. Here they make gingerbread Josephs with colorful coats.

being read straight from the Bible, the tone and subtleties within the music help them get there. Regarding a song about Isaac finding comfort in his marriage with Rebekah following the death of Sarah, my own daughter said to me, “Mommy, you have to watch this song. It’s really good—it will make you cry!”

It seems fitting to finish this article with the passage from Scripture that

ends every episode’s credit roll. It encapsulates the frame of mind of the sisters and brothers who work so hard on this production to give God the glory.

*To the only wise God our Saviour,
be glory and majesty, dominion and
power, both now and ever. Amen.*
(Jude 25).

*Jessica Gelineau,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

You can listen to all of the songs from Seasons 1 and 2 of *In His Footsteps* on all major streaming platforms, including Spotify! This is a great resource for listening at home, in the car, during your Sunday School classes, or really just any time your child begs to hear one specific song that they enjoyed from the show, but you don’t have time to fast-forward through episodes to look for it. I speak from experience. <https://tinyurl.com/3rjtv97b>

Want to try some of the crafts shown in the show? You can find supply lists for every craft here: <https://cssa.asn.au/footsteps/craft-activities>

The show episodes directly correspond with the sixty lessons in the Kindergarten Sunday School notes available on the CSSA website. Many ecclesias employ the CSSA curriculum already! Or, find the notes for purchase here: <https://cssa.asn.au/product/kindy-notes>

\$5 (USD) a month is the cost of signing up for a CSSA Media Works account, which you will need in order to stream episodes of *In His Footsteps*.

If you are able, why not gift a subscription to a family in your ecclesia who would welcome the spiritual and fun entertainment?

<https://tinyurl.com/ycyzvnz3>

Do you have any neighbors or friends outside the ecclesia who have young children or grandchildren who might enjoy the show or the songs from the show? Introduce them to the *In His Footsteps* media to share the gospel light.

Find them on Facebook @ InHisFootstepsShow or Insta @ in.his.steps



GOD IS NOT A MONSTER

By Chris Sales

WE live in a “post-modernist” world that, for the most part, denies the existence of a Creator, Designer God, and His standard of Truth. In fact, many today would echo the words of Pilate—“*What is truth?*” Instead, science is the god of the New Atheists, where natural selection and random processes are put forward to explain all the diversity and beauty in nature, and truth is considered situational, relative, and fluid.

In this context, attacks on the God of the Bible have become more common and much more aggressive. Perhaps you have even heard it said that the God of the Old Testament is an angry, jealous, vengeful God that condones genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, slavery, and rape! Since God is now a target, anyone who believes in Him is considered either uninformed, at best, or complicit with such behavior and attitudes, at worst.

The Bible claims we are created “*in the image of God*.” To New Atheists like Daniel Dennett, this statement is an example of the God of the Bible being an egotistical maniac that craves praise and devotion and so makes copies of Himself out of vanity! But is that view justified and consistent with how the Bible presents God? By no means! To be made in the image of God, and to receive His gift of salvation, are expressions of God’s kindness and love, not divine arrogance. God wants to share His creation with humankind and gave the first couple dominion over the rest of creation to behave as wise and benevolent monarchs—to act as God Himself would.

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. (Psa 139:14).

Being in God’s image also relates to our ability to reason and make moral decisions. This priestly role was designed for humans, which, united with creative thought, was meant to allow us to care for and wisely harness creation. Nevertheless, God also allowed free will, and sadly, mankind has abused these privileges to the detriment of society and nature.

God made humankind upright, but they have sought many evil schemes. (Eccl 7:29 NET).

To be made in the image of God, and to receive His gift of salvation, are expressions of God’s kindness and love, not divine arrogance.

Rather than twisting the fact that we were made in God’s image into something negative about God’s motivation, we understand it as an expression of God’s desire to spread His wonderful characteristics of kindness, love, mercy, and forgiveness.

We see embodied in Jesus Christ the “*fulness of God his Father*,” and in Him, we see a loving, humble, devoted servant who was willing to give his life to save others. Even in society, such sacrifices are lauded and praised.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:10).

Any praise, worship or honor genuinely directed to God, or His Son Jesus, is not intended to pacify or placate a vain, power-hungry deity; rather, it is a

heartfelt and appropriate reaction from those who are truly thankful for the great sacrifices made on our behalf and the great blessings given to us by God—including being made in His image.

Maybe you have struggled to read sections of the Bible that seem so foreign to our 21st-century norms and experiences. Many

of our young people cringe when they read certain sections of the Old Testament. With the propaganda of the New Atheists dominating social media, we may not have answers to their questions.

In this series of articles, we hope to address some of these issues and encourage you to trust the Bible and its Divine author. We also hope to give some insights and suggestions on how we are to understand the difficult sections of the Bible.

We are taking the position that God is **not** a moral monster and that the claims against Him are either due to misunderstanding, misinformation, or in some cases, a deliberate and blatant attempt to denigrate the Christian God. In this first article, we will look at three overarching principles that relate to this topic.

God's Methods Are Mysterious To Us.

In his book, *Is God a Moral Monster?* Paul Copan says, "The Scriptures reveal a God who works through messy, seemingly inefficient processes—including human choices and failures—to accomplish His redemptive purposes. **God is always almost late!**"

God **rarely** acts as we think He should, and He certainly does not do things the way we would if we were in charge! For example, He began the promise "*your descendants will be as multitudinous as the stars in heaven and the sand on the seashore*" with an elderly, infertile couple, Abraham and Sarah! Definitely not what we would have done.

God, Himself makes the following claim,

Indeed, My plans are not like your plans, and My deeds are not like your deeds, for just as the heaven is higher than the earth, so My deeds are superior to your deeds and My plans superior to your plans. (Isa 55:8-9 NET).

Instead of being critical of God's methods and means, we should thank and praise Him for the wonder of His ways! "*How many living things you have made, O Lord! You have exhibited great skill in making all of them; the earth is full of the living things you have made*" (Psa 104:24 NET).

You Cannot Judge God or Jesus by the Actions of Their Professed Followers.

In fact, Jesus himself warned about this fallacy in Matthew 7:15, 22-23 (NET), where he says,

Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. You will recognize them by their works. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, and do many powerful deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Go away from me, you workers of iniquity!'

"My plans are not like your plans...for just as the heaven is higher than the earth...My plans [are] superior to your plans."

So, have professed Christians done terrible things? Yes. Does that mean there is a problem with the principles of Christianity? No! Have professed Atheists done good things? Yes. Does that mean that the principles of Atheism are a viable foundation on which to base society? Not necessarily! We must judge Atheism and Theism based on the **principles** each espouse.

Richard Dawkins speaks about the underpinnings of Atheism.

“In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.” (*River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*).

The logical conclusion of a cold, blind universe with no absolute authority means people can make their own decisions about what is right or wrong. People like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao, and many others made decisions that killed millions of people.

The following words of Jesus could summarize the principles of Christianity:

I say to you, love your enemy, bless those who curse you, do good to

those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you, so that you may be like your Father in heaven.”
(Matt 5:44-45).

Would Jesus approve of what happened during the Inquisition, the Crusades or the persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust? Certainly not! A society based on the principles of the Golden Rule espoused by Jesus would be one in which everyone would live with more care and concern for each other.

The contributions made by those motivated by the Golden Rule espoused by Jesus include preserving literature and encouraging literacy, advancing education, laying the foundations of modern science and cultivating art and music, which from a purely naturalistic worldview, contribute nothing to the preservation of the species! In fact, it was often the true followers of Christianity that promoted human rights, fought for better working conditions for people, and led the cause to overthrow slavery.

The Law of Moses Was Always Meant to be Temporary and Provisional.

The Law allowed for a transition from the family/tribal clans of the children of Israel to nationhood under judges and kings. The “Law of Moses” given by God at Sinai was a necessary part of God’s unfolding plan, but it was not God’s final word. It was given for a specific period and then set aside—not because it was a bad thing that now needed to be abolished, but because it

God's ways and methods may appear messy and inefficient to us, but through these processes, God transforms us, assuming we allow His word to change our hearts and minds.

was a good thing whose purpose had been accomplished.

Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. (Rom 7:12).

How then did God address matters such as patriarchal structures, rights of the firstborn, polygamy, warfare, slavery, and several other fallen social provisions that were part of the culture of that day? How and why did God put up with situations that were so far from the ideal?

He met Israel partway.

As Jesus stated in Matthew 19:8, [The law of] *“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your hard hearts, but from the beginning it was not this way.”* We could apply this passage to many problematic structures within the ancient Near East context: We could say, “Because of your hard hearts, the Law of Moses permitted slavery and patriarchy, warfare and the like, and your actions sometimes caused God to become jealous and angry, but from the beginning, it was not this way.”

Although the Law made allowances for these things, it also implemented safeguards to prevent abuse. It curtailed and regulated the worst of human nature and enforced God's standards of love, mercy, and kindness. It is important to understand that these

allowances were not ideal or universal. They were meant to be temporary and transitional, leading Israel towards their Messiah—in whom they would see what God intended.

Like two sides of the same coin, we have human hard-heartedness on the one side and divine forbearance on the other. God put up with many aspects of human “fallenness” and adjusted accordingly. Ultimately, grace triumphed over law, but it took time.

In summary, God's ways and methods may appear messy and inefficient to us, but through these processes, God transforms us, assuming we allow His word to change our hearts and minds. The principles of God's word should determine His character, not the misbehavior of those professing to act in His name! We must be careful to manifest the true characteristics of Yahweh, lest we bring disrepute to His name! And finally, Israel's Old Testament covenant, or law, is not a universal ideal or standard and was never intended to be so!

In our next article, we plan to look more closely at what the Bible says about slavery.

*Chris Sales,
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ECCLESIAL WORSHIP IN THE FIRST CENTURY

By Peter Hemingray

THERE was no equivalent to our *Ecclesial Guide* in the first century. Nor is there a “Mode of Conducting Meetings” in the Bible. There were no ecclesial halls, just gatherings in various private homes, which would collectively be addressed as, for example, “*all in Rome*.”

Immediately after Pentecost, the early Christians met daily.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.” (Acts 2:46-47 NIV).¹

Clearly, they had their main meal together every day and appeared to have at least broken bread and offered prayers in memory of the broken body of their Lord. Moreover, we must recollect that these Jews in Jerusalem had previously been supported by the Jews elsewhere in Israel. Because they

became Christians, they now had no means of employment, hence the later “Jerusalem Poor Fund.”

Decades later, by the time of Paul, the Gentiles were probably in the majority, and it was also impractical to eat their meal together every day. So, a different form of worship appears to have evolved. From all evidence, it was based in private homes (house churches).

Greet Prisca and Aquila...greet also the church in their house.” (Rom 16:3-5 ESV).

Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. (Col 4:15 ESV).

There was a Christian body in a city, but it was comprised of individual house churches, and it was at these that meetings took place.

So, what form did these meetings take? It is clear they took place on a Sunday, the first day of the week, but when? We must

remember that for Jews, their day begins with sunset on Saturday, so I would argue the first day of the week begins on Saturday night and that the meeting probably started around that time. Further, we know from 1 Corinthians 11 that such meetings also involved a meal.

But there are clues that early Christian meetings involved much more than just the memorial feast. In 1 Corinthians 11, the issue was the conduct of the members at the meal, but in 1 Corinthians 14, the problem presented is of speaking with tongues. We read, *“When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”* (1 Cor 14:26 ESV). Of course, this list is not an order of service, nor is it inclusive. It mentions neither prayer nor prophecy, the latter of which appears to be what we would term an exhortation. We are given other somewhat cryptic references to this type of meeting in the New Testament, such as Colossians 3:16, and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-20, but they add no real details.

So, in 1 Corinthians 14, we have what we would probably describe as a combined form of lecture and devotion. Whether non-Christians were present is uncertain, but I would consider it likely. So, the question is, was this a separate meeting?

By the 2nd century, it seems that the worship services were combined and lasted about 3 hours, as outlined below. In the first century, there was no “day of rest” except the Sabbath in Israel. It, therefore, seems likely the meetings were held in the evening; after all, it is called a supper. The contents and order of the meetings appear in the New Testament

to have been highly variable. However, they were infused throughout by an awareness of the transforming power of the gospel, aided as it was by the words of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Second-Century Order of Service

We do have some indication of the order of service in the 2nd century. The following seems to have been the typical order:²

Part 1

- Opening greeting by bishop and response by the congregation. Often, the bishop would say “The Lord be with you,” and the congregation would respond, “And with your spirit.”
- Old Testament Scripture reading, usually read or chanted by a deacon.
- Psalm or hymn chanted or sung.
- New Testament Scripture reading. This first New Testament reading was from any New Testament book outside the gospels.
- Psalm or hymn.
- New Testament Scripture reading (II). From one of the four gospels.
- Sermon. Delivered by the bishop while seated.
- Dismissal of all but baptized believers.

Part 2: The Eucharist

- Congregational prayers.
- The Lord’s Supper. Here’s the order:
 1. The bishop offered a greeting;
 2. The congregation responded;
 3. There was a “kiss of peace” (men to men, women to women);
 4. Church members brought their own small loaf of bread and flask of wine

from home; the deacons took these and spread them out on the Lord's table, emptying the flasks of wine into one large silver cup;

5. The bishop and the congregation engaged in a liturgical "dialogue" with the congregation;
6. The bishop led the congregation in prayer;
7. The bishop and the deacons broke the bread and distributed the cup to the congregation;
8. Something would be said to each member as he or she received the elements (e.g., "The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus," with the response of "Amen.") Unconsumed bread and wine would be taken home by church members to use for celebrating communion at home during the weekdays.

Part 3: Benediction

Possible Order of Service

We can use order of Service in the 2nd century to add to the information given in the Letters of Paul. In the beginning, these services would have been in the evening of the Sabbath, when the audience (including many slaves) might have had free time. Only later would meetings take place on what we would term as Sunday.

We can tentatively describe what a Christian service might have looked like in the second half of the first century. It was probably divided into two segments, with a pause to rearrange the room between them. The first period was probably open to potential as well as actual members, but there would have

been probably less than 30 present, as most of the services were in private homes, putting a limit on the numbers present.

First Session

- Open with Prayer.
- Hymns (probably the Psalms).
- Some form of what we would term a lecture, perhaps assigned ahead of time.
- Possibly a reading from one of the Letters of the Apostles or some well-known words of Jesus.
- An open period for any brother to say whatever he felt moved to utter.
- In rare cases very early, a period of speaking with tongues (but this seems to have died out).
- Close with prayer.

After the close of the first session, it is likely that only baptized members would be present for the second session.

Second Session—Memorial Feast

It seems certain that the early church combined the memorial service with a communal meal. So, the service would be:

- Presider opened with prayer, breaking a physical loaf of leavened bread in memory of Jesus, perhaps prefaced by a few appropriate words.
- For the meal, it seems the food was brought by each individual or family.
- After the meal: "The Cup after Supper," in the words of 1 Corinthians 11:25 (ESV), along with some remarks and prayer, offering thanks for the shed blood of the Lord.

The Cup after Supper

For many years, I believed that a common cup, passed from hand to hand, was closest to the example of Jesus, who, as we read in Luke 22:17 (ESV), “took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, ‘Take this, and divide it among yourselves.’” We note that Paul tells us, as informed by Jesus, that it was “*The cup after supper*.” Now, in Paul’s day, it was a communal meal, and almost certainly, each participant had their own cup. So, they either:

- Drank from the special large communal cup, as was the 2nd Century custom in large gatherings.
- Or each person’s cup had been refilled, and they each simultaneously drank from their own cup in a symbolic acknowledgment of the new covenant.

The above is only a brief summary of what are, in fact, many alternatives. I suspect the first was almost universal in churches after the first century until the 20th century.

Lessons For Us

Our somewhat rigid form of service has evolved. John Thomas placed the exhortation after the emblems, but he had an address before as well. By 1886, Robert Roberts had the exhortation (less than 30 minutes) before the emblems but another exhortation of 15 minutes after. However, these are minor details. The important item to note is that as the churches grew, the meal as part of the Memorial disappeared.

So, what can we learn from this little study?

- Although Christadelphians from their origin have struggled with abandoning the common cup, I have come to the opinion that the very early church possibly used individual cups, which they filled or brought to the service.
- We sometimes struggle to differentiate between the purpose of the Bread and the Wine. As a community, the first Christians probably ate the bread from one loaf, showing their united memory of the Lord, and possibly also the wine in separate cups, showing their individual devotion.
- I once had a meal which combined the food with a Memorial Service. The bread was broken before, the wine taken after (and not just a sip). We each drank our cup of wine simultaneously in memory of the New Covenant. I felt it somehow sanctified the whole time, as I have never experienced before or since. I wonder if I will ever do this again!
- I wonder if our Sunday meeting attempts to capture the fervor of those of the early church. When we have a rigid structure, I somehow doubt we do. At least some meetings have a period for special prayers at the end of the service.

After two thousand years, capturing the spirit of the first century church is difficult, but perhaps we might try a little harder sometimes.

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¹ There is no mention of speaking with tongues outside of Acts and 1 Corinthians, so the early Christians seem to have heard the warnings of Paul.

² From *2,000 Years of Christ’s Power* by N.R. Needham, Part 1.

PART 4 A TEMPLE FILLED WITH UNSEARCHABLE RICHES

By George Booker

Who Needs a Temple with Animal Sacrifices?

*This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles
the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Eph 3:8).¹*

TODAY, some Christadelphians spend a great deal of time, individually and collectively, thinking about a future, literal temple. We imagine its vast dimensions and the immense wealth which will be poured into it—as though it will be a bigger, better version of Solomon's Temple and/or Herod's Temple. Perhaps we see this future temple as the centerpiece of Christ's Kingdom on earth.

One particular interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48 (Henry Sulley's),² has gained such a foothold in parts of

our brotherhood that its belief has practically attained a first-principle status.

It should be said here that such an elevated status for this proposition was never intended at the beginning, as demonstrated by a portion of the lengthy article that first appeared in *The Christadelphian Magazine* (Birmingham, U.K.) in May 1898.³ This same article has been reprinted subsequently in the pages of the same magazine, at least twice, by each of the first two editors who succeeded

Robert Roberts:

- a) C.C. Walker: *The Christadelphian Magazine*, Vol. 60, No. 70–June 1923, pp. 248–256.
- b) John Carter, *The Christadelphian Magazine*, Vol. 92, No. 109–Nov. 1955, pp. 414–418.

This article, written by Bro. Roberts shortly before his death in September 1898, lists a number of teachings and ideas which had been held by some Christadelphians but which, by common consent, had never risen to the level of first principles. In other words, as Roberts put it, they were merely "uncertain details" which should never be allowed to affect fellowship among brothers and sisters. These ideas included:

- The details of God's appearance.
- The manner and methods of creation.
- The origin of God's holy angels and their precise standing in the sight of God
- The details of organization and government in the future Kingdom Age on the earth.
- The exact nature of the Bible "devil" in any given Bible passage, that is, whether the "devil" refers to a person, a government or another organization, or the general principle of "evil" in the world and in the individual.
- The actual location of the Judgment Seat which Christ will establish on the earth when he returns; and—pertaining to our special subject here:

- **The size of Christ's future temple upon the earth, or the form and shape of its construction.**

Robert Roberts's complete statement about the last "general truth" above, along with the "uncertain detail" which pertains to it, is as follows:

The Temple:

(a) The General Truth: That Christ will build the temple of the future age as a house of prayer for all people.

(b) The Uncertain Detail: What will be the size of it? What will be the shape of it? There are no grounds for absolute certainty. There are strong grounds for the view presented by Bro. Sulley in his temple book: but we should not be justified in making the reception of this view a condition of fellowship. It is sufficient that the general truth is received. Any view that may be entertained about details is not inconsistent with the general truth.

Although Bro. Roberts accepted much of Bro. Sulley's thesis on the last nine chapters of Ezekiel, his words above also make it plain he never considered this idea a first principle. Nor did he believe that others should or would make it so.

Another lesser-known fact bears out this observation. Even though Robert Roberts accepted much of Henry Sulley's thesis and gave it considerable publicity in *The Christadelphian Magazine* (even saying there were "strong grounds" for accepting it), not every believer followed suit, even at that time. There is quite a body of

discussion, from more than a few other believers, in another Christadelphian periodical of the time, *The Fraternal Visitor*. These monthly magazines themselves, the ones published from the 1880s to the turn of the century, are difficult, if not impossible, to find these days. However, the expositions there cover a wide range of alternative interpretations of Ezekiel 40-48. They also offer serious scholarly counterpoints to Henry Sulley's ideas. This is not the place to go into this matter for now, but perhaps this area may be explored more fully in the future.

The Hebrew tabernacles and temples of the Old Testament, up to and including Herod's, were built (and furnished and organized) in attempts to serve the LORD God of Israel. However, as each fell into ruin or was destroyed, sometimes by Israel's enemies, it has been understood by the prophets—including the Lord Jesus Christ—as a result of God's will.

It seems that all such great divinely appointed places of animal sacrifice to the LORD have, in the end, proved to be of no lasting value or consequence. The writer to the Hebrews has sounded the final death knell of such buildings and services.

The New Testament evidence (of which there is a considerable amount in Hebrews) suggests that there should be no need for such sacrifices after the

perfect and once-for-all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Heb 7:18-28; 9:9, 12, 28; 10:4, 11, 12, 14, 18; also compare Eph 2:15; Col 2:14; Rom 10:4).

Let us consider one passage from the Letter to the Hebrews.

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this

reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood

of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased." Then I said, "Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God" [quoting from Psalm 40:6-8]. First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here


It seems that all such great divinely appointed places of animal sacrifice to the LORD have, in the end, proved to be of no lasting value or consequence.

I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [that is, Jesus Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for

his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Heb 10:1-14).

Although this statement was in the first instance about the Law of Moses, it seems clear that the writer of the Letter is stating certain basic principles about any sacrifice:

- Once "perfection" has been achieved, sacrifices should stop being offered. These sacrifices require death, over and over, and



Under the new covenant, the only true sacrifice is the one the Lord himself has already offered, once, for all time and for all people.

by their very nature, are a continual reminder of sin (the wages of which is death). At the same time, however, they do not provide an absolute cleansing from that sin. Don't such animal sacrifices seem inappropriate in the Kingdom of God when so many will have been so perfectly cleansed forever from sin and its consequences?

- Won't even the more positive sacrifices, such as burnt offerings and peace offerings—which are plainly alluded to in Psalm 40 and Hebrews 10 as being fulfilled in Christ—seem out of place in the Kingdom? We remember, as Paul said, that all these regulations have been *"abolished"* in the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 2:15 KJV), who *"having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."* (Col 2:14). This suggests that the repetition of any such sacrifices would continue to keep sin in the forefront, when instead people living in God's Kingdom should be reminded of the complete remedy for that sin, the Man who himself will be a physical presence there.
- Jesus is the One who came to do the will of God, and as such, he is the sin offering, burnt offering and peace offering, all rolled into one. He is also the *"end of the law"* (Rom 10:4 KJV) in two senses: (1) he brings the law to a conclusion because (2) he is himself the complete fulfillment and personification of that law. As

such, he is the living demonstration that the old law of sacrifices is no longer necessary. When a building is completed, shouldn't the scaffolding be removed?

- Through Jesus, God *"set aside"* (Greek *athetesis*) the first covenant, which was *"weak and useless."* (Heb 7:18-19). He did this so that He might establish the *"second,"* which was *"a better hope,"* because it allowed believers to draw nearer to Him (Heb 10:19). The second covenant is *"the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus"* (Rom 8:2), also called *"the new covenant."* (Heb 8:13; Jer 31:31-34). Under this new covenant, the only true sacrifice is the one the Lord himself has already offered, once, for all time and for all people.

So, we must ask the question: Will there finally be, in the Kingdom Age, a **third** covenant, reinstituting other animal sacrifices similar to the Law of Moses? All Bible evidence tells us that these sacrifices were done away with forever by the **second** covenant (Heb 10:9). Therefore, to go back to such sacrifices is equivalent, in Scriptural terms, to going back to Egypt after being freed from slavery. This seems counterproductive and confusing, to say the least!

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish

to be enslaved by them all over again? (Gal 4:8-9).

The one sacrifice of Christ has made faithful men and women "*perfect forever*." (Heb 10:14; cp. Heb 9:12, 28). That perfect sacrifice has been enough for numerous generations of men and women, both Jews and Gentiles, who have lived and died from that day to this. And it will be equally sufficient for all those mortals living during the Kingdom Age. Does there really need to be some other sacrifice for those future generations of mortal peoples? Isn't the Lord Jesus Christ enough?

The Hebrews passages we have cited—in fact, the whole of the Letter—argued for the soon-coming termination of all temple ritual:

By calling this covenant "new," [the LORD God] has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Heb 8:13).

This came, as a matter of fact, with the destruction of Herod's temple in AD 70. When the Romans destroyed that temple, it presented—to the Jews and to the world—God's corroborating evidence that the sacrifice of His Son had become, once and for all time, the only true and eternal Divine remedy for the human condition of inevitable sin and death.

The same sort of divine proof was provided initially in the tearing of the veil to the Most Holy, from top to bottom, at the time of Christ's crucifixion:

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Matt 27:51).

This opened the way for a new approach into a reconstituted Most Holy through the blood of Christ:

We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body. (Heb 10:19-20).

So, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it, having offered that one perfect sacrifice at one time and one time only, Christ "*sat down*." (Heb 10:12). That is, he ceased his priestly labors, at least those pertaining to the offering of sacrifice (or sacrifices).

What is the Point of Animal Sacrifices in the Kingdom?

It is indeed plain that there is no longer any need to foreshadow the offering of Christ, once that sacrifice has been completed by his resurrection, glorification and ascension to heaven.

A further point ought to be mentioned. Even the supporters of Bro. Sulley's interpretation must admit there is no value or benefit pertaining to forgiveness of sins or eternal life in the sacrifice of animals during the Millennium. Furthermore, the only possible reason for such sacrifices is to demonstrate to spectators what these services must have been like in earlier times. This is explained by the author himself, who can rationalize such elaborate sacrifices only as a **looking back** to the one sacrifice of Christ. He writes:

"How are we to understand [the] re-institution [of animal sacrifices] in view of the testimony respecting him who 'hath offered one sacrifice for sins for ever' (Heb

10:12 KJV)? The obvious inference is that, as under the Mosaic law animal sacrifices pointed forward to the sacrificial Lamb of God's providing, so, in the age to come, animal sacrifices will point backward to that same provision for taking away sin. As in the former case animal sacrifices could never in themselves 'take away sins,' so also in the latter."⁴

Bro. Sulley's admission takes on all the more significance when we stand back for a moment and recognize how serious some believers feel about a Millennial temple. As stated already, this gigantic and marvelously detailed temple—which the author envisioned as being built at Jerusalem—is also assumed to be the focal point of worship in the Age to come.

How meaningful will be the "worship" at a building when the Lord Jesus Christ (the true temple which God built) will be present among all of mankind? Knowing Jesus to be the focal point of worship in the Millennium, I have to say that such a fixation upon a mere building seems perilously close to idolatry.

How can we take Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice and put it to the side as negligible? How can we seek spiritual fulfillment in procedures that have "waxeth old" (Heb 8:13 KJV) and in an ongoing slaughter of animals that can never take away sin?

One must ask how important, truly, is a grand edifice when its primary purpose is not salvation but instruction in old rituals rendered obsolete by newer

circumstances.

And why is further instruction needed in the principles of sacrifice for anyone, when the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ dwells on the earth in the midst of his family, his brothers and sisters? And why is such instruction needed when our Savior has already instituted a suitable memorial for all who believe in him, the Breaking of Bread. (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:23-29)?

We may add that the Breaking of Bread is a memorial that the Lord Jesus has promised to renew with his beloved brothers and sisters when he returns to celebrate the "*marriage supper of the Lamb*" (Rev 19:9) in the Kingdom of God.

In an essay entitled "Ezekiel's Restoration Prophecies" (from *Twenty Essays in Search for Truth*), Bro. Alan Fowler writes:

"With the exception of Henry Sulley and his highly idiosyncratic interpretation of the Temple Vision, all architects who have attempted a reconstruction have come to a conclusion that the description of the future temple in Ezekiel depicts an essentially Mosaic pattern in the structure of the temple and in its sacrifices and its insistence on circumcision of those who worship.

Believers in a reconstructed Mosaic Millennial temple argue that this is necessary in order to educate the mortal population. However, they fail to explain how, for about 2,000 years, we have been able to

understand the symbology of the temple without its existence. We are therefore being asked to accept that in the Millennium, there will be a widespread prevalence of what today we call “learning disability” among the mortal population of the earth.

It is easy to understand how religious Jews who reject the Lord Jesus Christ look forward to the rebuilding of a Mosaic temple, but it is very difficult to understand how those who accept the inspiration of the writer to the Hebrews and of the apostle Paul could ever anticipate a reconstruction of a Mosaic temple in the Millennial Age.”⁵

Some of our own hymns, which appear in our current hymnbook and have been sung for many years, implicitly make the same points as above, that is, that the Old Testament sacrifices have been replaced, forever, by the one sacrifice of the Great Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17).

Hymn 258

We other priests deny,
And laws, and offerings too.
None but the Priest on high
The mighty work can do:
Through him, then, all our praise be
given,
Who pleads his household's cause in
heaven

Hymn 261

Now let our humble faith behold
Our great High Priest above,
And celebrate his constant care
And sympathetic love.
The names of all the saints he bears,
Engraven on his heart:
Nor shall the lowliest saint complain
That he has lost his part.
Those characters shall firm remain,
Our everlasting trust,
When gems and monuments and
crowns
Have moldered into dust.

Hymn 262

The true Messiah now appears,
The types are all withdrawn;
So fly the shadows and the stars
Before the rising dawn.
Now sacrifice, and offered lambs,
And kids and bullocks slain;
Incense and spice of costly names
Would all be burnt in vain.
Aaron must lay his robes away,
No longer offerings bring,
When God's own Son is sworn to be
Redeemer, Priest and King.
We would do well, I believe, to listen
carefully to the words of our own
hymns as we sing them and then to
heed our own self-administered advice.

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Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

² Sulley, Henry, *The Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy*, Nottingham, U.K, 1887.

³ *True Principles and Uncertain Details; or the Danger of Going Too Far in our Demands on Fellow-Believers*, Vol. 35, pp. 182-189, by Robert Roberts, author and editor.

⁴ Ibid, Henry Sulley, *The Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy*, pp. 58, 59.

⁵ Fowler, Alan W., *Twenty Essays in Search for Truth*, Ortho Books, 2013.

PART 5 A BIBLICAL DEMONOLOGY

By Richard Morgan

OUR brief consideration of Paul's speech in Athens has uncovered for us the Biblical demonology that the demons of the ancient Near East were the small gods of paganism. But what does this tell us about the gospel records where Jesus cast out demons? Was he really casting out small pagan gods?

To answer that question, I call to mind a class I gave on demons about twenty years ago in Panama, a country steeped in religious superstition. Having concluded what I thought was a well-reasoned talk, a lady in the audience put up her hand to object. She told me that just the night before, her cousin had seen a demon in his house. So, they are real, she said, and no amount of logical reasoning from Scripture would dissuade her.

That's the thing about *deisdemonia*, belief in the small gods of paganism. The superstitious mindset connected with it can't be reasoned with or appealed to logically. Debating with people who believe in supernatural forces of evil, the devil and demons, isn't easy. And on mission work in Panama, we found that it was often the most stubborn of false teachings to counteract.

Think about Moses' interaction with Pharaoh and the magicians of Egypt. He didn't come to the king with the logical argument that the gods of their pantheon didn't have any real existence and there is only one God, and his name was Yahweh. There were no sit-downs with Pharaoh where they opened the scroll of Genesis so Moses and Aaron could put forward their theological argument. The impotence of the gods

of Egypt had to be demonstrated with power. Each of the plagues against Egypt was an attack against one or more of their gods.

Last month we looked at the name of a demon that crops up in Deuteronomy 31—Resheph. His name also occurs in the Psalm 78 record of the plagues.

When he performed his signs in Egypt and his marvels in the fields of Zoan. He turned their rivers to blood, so that they could not drink of their streams. He sent among them swarms of flies, which devoured them, and frogs, which destroyed them. He gave their crops to the destroying locust and the fruit of their labor to the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamores with frost. He gave over their cattle to the hail and their flocks to thunderbolts. He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels. He made a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death, but gave their lives over to the plague. He struck down every firstborn in Egypt, the firstfruits of their strength in the tents of Ham. (Psa 78:43-51).¹

The word for “thunderbolts” in verse 48 is *resheph*. Thunderbolts found their way into plague number seven, which also happened to the plague that finally penetrated Pharaoh’s hard heart. It was after this plague in which God “sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth” (Exod 9:23) that Pharaoh admitted, “*This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.*” (v.

27), something he had not said before. Something had reached Pharaoh on a theological level for him to use the religious word “*sinned*.”

There is a possible historical reason why the name of the pagan god Resheph appears in the psalm, and why this plague affected the king so much. Egyptologist William Kelly Simpson writes in his book, *Resheph in Egypt*, “The Canaanite Resheph, whose cult was brought to Egypt in the middle of Dynasty 18” and “established the reign of Amenophis II as the date of the introduction of the cult in Egypt.”

Amenophis II is another name for Amenhotep II, a prime candidate for the Pharaoh of the Exodus. In the private collection of another Egyptologist, Bernhard Grdseloff, there is a scarab seal of Amenhotep II with this inscription: “Aheperure [=Amenhotep II], the beloved of Resheph.”

We read that “Resheph become popular in Egypt under Amenhotep II (18th dynasty), where he served as god of horses and chariots.”² This is ironic, considering what happened at the Red Sea:

And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen. (Exod 14:17-18).

Could it be that what convinced Pharaoh in the seventh plague was his beloved god being shown to have less power than Yahweh of the Hebrews?

Whether it was Amenhotep II or not, the point still stands that the plagues were a dramatic testimony to the fact that Yahweh had far more power. The Egyptians and Hebrews should not fear the gods of Egypt. No need to suffer from *deisdemonia*—just as Paul said in his speech.

It is also interesting to note in Psalm 78 that the actions of the plagues were undertaken by “*a company of destroying angels.*” (v. 49).

Another element of the demon miracles is often called the accommodation language. Another way to express it is that the gospel writers used **phenomenological language**. A modern-day example is a falsehood we utter many times when we say, “the sun is rising” or “the sun is setting.” The sun is doing no such thing. It doesn’t rise or set. Instead, we see the effects of the Earth’s orbit. However, from our point of view, that’s exactly

What Jesus did for the witnesses to his miracles is what Yahweh did for the Egyptians and Hebrews. He demonstrated that the God of Israel has more power than the gods of paganism...

What the nations ascribed to their made-up gods was the domain of Yahweh and His agents.

Regarding demon miracles in the gospel records, we can assign the principle of the plagues accordingly. What was Jesus’ purpose? Was he out to win theological debates or did he want to convince his listeners he came from God, demonstrating that the power of the Holy Spirit at his disposal was more potent than the demons that inhabited the poor souls he encountered? Jesus **could** have had a sit-down with the people when demon-possessed individuals were brought to him. He could have logically explained to them that demons have no real existence.

But that wouldn’t have convinced anyone. They saw people possessed by demons with their own eyes—of course; they had real existence. You just had to look!

what the sun is doing—rising or setting. We use phenomenological language, meaning we express how we perceive phenomena from our point of view.

What did the people of Jesus’ day see from their point of view? People possessed by evil demons (or small gods.) That’s what they saw, and that’s what the gospel writers record them as seeing, even though from a 21st century perspective, it is entirely false.

What Jesus did for the witnesses to his miracles is what Yahweh did for the Egyptians and Hebrews. He demonstrated that the God of Israel has more power than the gods of paganism, and it is He who should be feared above all gods. (Psa 96:4).

It didn’t matter that the people continued with a false belief about demons. What mattered was that they followed Jesus instead. It seems this

accommodation carried on in the 1st Century ecclesia. In Corinth, for example, Paul remonstrates with those who are puffed up because of their knowledge. It's worthwhile examining 1 Corinthians 8 in detail. Paul begins by saying:

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. (v. 1).

Paul isn't talking about knowledge in general (which is a virtue) but "this knowledge" or a certain kind of knowledge related to the topic of idols. He then goes on to speak about that kind of knowledge:

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." (v. 4).

The words in quotes are the knowledge that puffs up in the context of the situation in the Corinthian Ecclesia. There were members there who knew that idols have no real existence and only one God exists. The inference, which Paul goes on to confirm, is that some members of the ecclesia didn't have this kind of knowledge, which sounds like Paul didn't do his job teaching first principles. Surely, everyone in the ecclesia should have known the most fundamental of doctrines that there is only one God? The point is that they probably were taught it and did know it on a conceptual level but struggled with it on a **psychological** level. The next verse says:

For although there may be so-called

gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" --yet for us there is one God, the Father. (vv. 5-6).

The demons mentioned in the New Testament are *so-called* gods that have no real existence. But then Paul says:

However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak conscience is defiled. (v. 7).

When Paul says, "not all possess this knowledge," they were surely taught that only Yahweh has any real existence. However, it is very difficult to let go of superstition. The emotional and psychological scars remained for the ecclesial member who had a former association with idols. They could probably cite passages from Isaiah that said things like "I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me, there is no God" (Isa. 45:5) and tell everyone that they believed it. However, the nagging feelings left over from their former association meant that the stronger members of the ecclesia needed to be patient and show some forbearance.

Likewise, our teaching and preaching aim shouldn't always be to put others right by our powerful logical arguments. What is more important is to show that the love of God is more powerful than anything possessed by the so-called "fixit" gods in our neo-pagan world.

*Richard Morgan,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

² The website address is religion.wikia.org/wiki/Resheph.

TREASURE IN PARADISE

By Anna Tikvah

WE are pleased to announce that *Treasure in Paradise* by Anna Tikvah is now available to order on Amazon in both paperback and e-book formats. The first two novels were, *The Enormous Tiny Experiment* and *Pain in Paradise*. All three books are available through Amazon.

This is the last story in the three-part series and is on a deeper level than the first two. The Tinys are now in their late teens, and the Bible has been discovered inside the dome. The discussions that take place inside and outside of Paradise conclude many of the issues raised. Due to serious injuries and a near fatality, a Caring Center must be immediately established in Paradise. Aided by doctors outside the dome, the new nurses try to follow instructions and save lives.

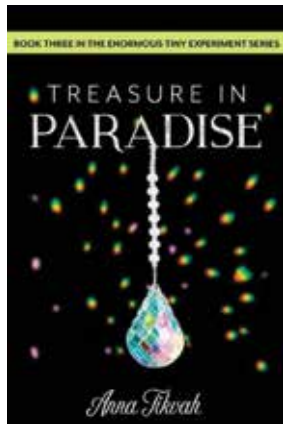
Meanwhile, discussions continue outside the dome. What is the basis of morality? Will love conquer all?

Or is there room for justice? Why did God require His beloved Son to face crucifixion? Is God the wrathful, capricious being that some portray, or has he been misunderstood? What is required for a satisfying, mutual relationship between God and us or the best of friends? Is there any evidence to prove the Bible is truly Divine?

Uncle Louis makes an astonishing request, and hidden treasures are discovered that the Professor didn't expect anyone to find. After

nineteen months of observation and reflection, will Jacques Lemans know what to say in his next media interview?

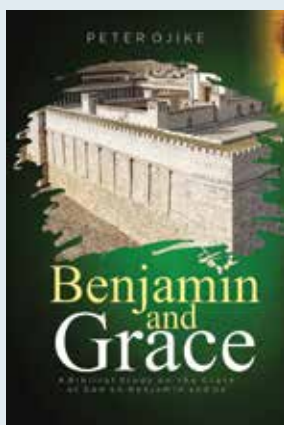
Treasure in Paradise is a safe, innocent series, but there is a little more romantic content in this final story, so we recommend it for ages twelve and up. If you haven't investigated this project yet, and you are beyond children's novels, it is possible to jump right into Book 3.



BENJAMIN AND GRACE

By Peter Ojike

The Tidings is pleased to announce the publishing of a new book, authored by Bro. Peter Ojike of Nigeria. Bro. Peter has written a powerful work that demonstrates the gracious hand of God in the life of Benjamin. He begins by examining the relationship between Benjamin and his older brother, Judah. Then he develops the story of the failure of the house of Saul and the mercy to be shown to David's son. He continues to the First Century, where Benjamin's Saul of Tarsus ravens as a



wolf but is transformed by the gospel of grace. Finally, Bro. Peter demonstrates how this will all culminate in the Kingdom of God when Christ will sit on the throne of grace in Zion. Benjamin and his descendants teach us about grace in ways we may not learn from any other character in the Bible, apart from Christ.

We are pleased to provide this excerpt from Bro. Peter's book. You may obtain your copy of the book through [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

EXCERPT FROM "BENJAMIN AND GRACE"

Paul's relationship with Christ is another chapter in the story of Benjamin's everlasting covenant with the seed of David. Saul of Tarsus prided himself on being Benjamin's seed. Looking back at his former life as a Pharisee, he states:

If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have

more: circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless. (Phil 3:4-6).

In Romans, Paul identifies himself as Benjamin's descendant, "For I also am

an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” (Rom. 11:1). So, it is conclusive that Paul is of the tribe of Benjamin, sharing in Benjamin’s blessing of grace.
Just as Benoni (“Son of my Sorrows”) became Benjamin (“Son of the right

hand/side”), Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Apostle. Paul is like Benjamin in many aspects. The life of Paul before he became a Christian and after is a fulfillment of these prophecies, as the chart below demonstrates:

Saul as a persecutor of the Church (Benoni = “Son of my sorrow/ trouble/wickedness”)	Paul as a follower of Jesus (Benjamin = “Son of the right hand”)
Prophecy: <i>Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil. (Gen 49:27).</i>	Prophecy: <i>About Benjamin he said: “Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders.” (Deut 33:12 NIV).</i>
Fulfillment? <i>But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (Acts 8:3. See also Acts 22:4 and Gal 1:13-14)</i>	Fulfillment? <i>Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 1:13-14. See also 1 Cor 15:8-9 and Acts 22:10)</i>

Paul indeed was a ravenous wolf to the church. He took it upon himself to destroy the church once and for all (Acts 8:3). Shortly before he encountered Jesus, we read that “*But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters*

to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1-2). The Greek word translated as “breathing” can also mean that Paul was “breathing out” threats against the Christians. It can also be translated as breathing

in—as if he “breathed in” threats as air. “Threatening and slaughter had come to be the very breath that Saul breathed, like a warhorse who sniffed the smell of battle. He breathed on the remaining disciples the murder that he had already breathed in from the death of the others. He exhaled what he inhaled.”¹

You understand the weight of the pain Paul brought to the church when you read that the church had peace immediately once this one man was converted to Christianity: *“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”* (Acts 9:31).

Saul’s heritage evokes Jonathan, and spiritually speaking, Paul is this long-promised seed of Jonathan. Saul (of Tarsus) clearly saw himself in Saul (the king of Israel) when he echoed the king’s words. (See 1 Sam 9:21 for Saul the King and 1 Cor 15:9-10 for Saul the Apostle.)

Paul saw the pattern. He is simply saying that, just as God chose Saul from Benjamin the least of the twelve tribes to be the king of natural Israel, in the same way, God has also chosen another Saul from Benjamin to be the leader of the spiritual Israel. However, Saul of Tarsus recognized that this could only be accomplished by the grace of God in him, the same grace of God that has followed Benjamin from the beginning.

There is no other person from Benjamin recorded in the Bible to have been called Saul except King Saul

and Saul of Tarsus. It seems likely that Saul of Tarsus was named after king Saul. We can infer that Paul was from the house of Saul, whose descendants continued to be proud of the first king. Perhaps Paul came from the line of Jonathan through Mephibosheth, the only male survivor in the house of Saul at the time.

Paul is very much like Jonathan in terms of faithfulness. Jonathan was indeed a man who walked with God and could read God’s clear message and interpret it very accurately, even if it meant forsaking his own status and position. The faith of Jonathan and Paul is most remarkable. We show our faith by our actions, especially when we are in a difficult situation that demands some sort of sacrifice from us. Jonathan easily could have fought the will of God to replace David with his father. Jonathan was the crown prince, so he had everything to gain if David never became king. But by faith, he worked to make David the king and gave up his high place in Israel to glorify David.

In the same vein, Paul gave up his place of prominence in Israel. Paul was a student of the great Gamaliel from the famous House of Hillel. He recounted his zeal for Judaism, but that all changed when he encountered Christ. He was willing to lose everything to gain the true riches in Christ:

- *And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.* (Gal 1:14).
- *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed,*

I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. (Phil 3:7-8).

We have been called into these true riches in Christ by the grace of God. What are we willing to lose or sacrifice for Christ's sake?

Paul—the seed of Jonathan—was the apostle of grace. We are reminded of Jonathan's prophecy: “Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between **my seed and thy seed for ever**. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.” (1 Sam. 20:42, **my emphasis**). This prophecy implies that the seed of David (Christ) will look at the house of Saul and ask: “Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?” (2 Sam. 9:1). Paul acknowledged the grace of God on him by telling us that, despite his past sins against the church, God chose him according to His ancient plan even before he was born:

*For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who **had set me apart before I was born**, and who called me **by his grace**, was pleased to reveal his Son to*

*me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone. (Gal 1:13-16 ESV, **my emphasis**).*

Mephibosheth's encounter with David is very similar to Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4-6). It is always a great privilege to meet in person and David could have blessed Mephibosheth without ever getting to see him. It was a great privilege and an act of grace for Paul to see Jesus face to face. This singular encounter with Christ placed him in a similar rank as the apostles of Christ. Paul knew how special this was: “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal 1:11-12 ESV). That encounter was indeed special, and it ushered a new period of God's plan for humankind's redemption. Paul's unique mission was to help bring the rest of the nations to the only living God through Christ.

Paul, the son of Benjamin, was not called just to be another Christian. He was called to fill a special place in the plan of God. The grace of God in Benjamin has been manifested in Paul. This knowledge alone could have made Paul arrogant, which would have led to his destruction. Reading through his letters, Paul struggled with the sin of pride. Grace is designed to save us; however, it can lead to our destruction if we abuse it.

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew about

this side of Paul. He allowed a very uncomfortable infirmity to torment Paul. This infirmity was designed to remind Paul that he was nothing before God, although God had chosen him for this special task. When Paul asked Christ to heal him, Christ reminded him that he already has God's grace, which is above every other gift from God, and which should be sufficient for him:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Cor 12:7-9).

Whatever challenge we have should not make us neglect the grace of God in our lives. This grace is above all weakness, want and sickness we may experience in this present life. The grace of God leads us to a perfect and whole life in Christ and in the Kingdom.

Realizing Paul's encounter with Christ gets me emotional because it shows that the seed of David never forgot Jonathan's descendants. I believe that at the right time, Christ (the seed of David) remembered Jonathan and chose to honor his covenant with David by showering grace on Saul the Pharisee. This is the pinnacle of grace. I stress this point because some may

feel that Jesus chose Paul only because he blasphemed and persecuted the church **ignorantly**. Paul felt the same way too, but acknowledged that grace overflowed for his sake. He wrote:

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 1:12-14).

However, Paul was not chosen only because he was an ignorant persecutor of the church. It is not true that God pardons everyone who rebels against Him or his son **ignorantly**. While on the cross, Jesus confessed that many of the Jews who killed him were ignorant of the fact that he was the Messiah, yet the destruction of God came upon that generation in AD 70. Also, Paul couldn't have been the only zealous Jew who persecuted the followers of Jesus ignorantly. So, why Paul? Grace! Grace found Benjamin; Grace found Paul! Was Paul representative of his people in this way? *"Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers."* (Acts 3:17 KJV).

Grace can change the least person and make him the greatest. We are in Christ today by this same grace. It's amazing that God has chosen to shower His grace on us. We know how insignificant and little we are. From a human perspective, when we look at the world's great leaders today, we are like ants in their presence. Yet, from God's perspective, in the Kingdom we

will not only put on immortality, but all governments will be subject to us. God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the wise.

We can make the mistake of not properly acknowledging the *overflowing* grace of God in choosing us to be in His glorious plan: “*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Rom. 5:8). We may think we deserved it somehow because we rigorously searched the Scriptures and found the truth. However, we are

not the only ones sincerely seeking for the true religion and true Christianity. We are not saved by our intellect, but by grace, which is a free gift.

Grace helps us to act in every way that opposes pride. Grace humbles us and exalts the one that chose us. This grace is uniquely demonstrated in the mercy God showed Benjamin. We see a unique similarity in the response of the children of Benjamin that found grace even up to Paul who is the promised seed.

Saul the King	Mephibosheth	Saul of Tarsus
<i>Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way? (1 Sam 1:21 KJV, my emphasis).</i>	<i>And he paid homage and said, “What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?” (2 Sam 9:8, my emphasis).</i>	<i>Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Cor 15:8-10, my emphasis)</i>

This must be our lifetime attitude to the overflowing grace bestowed on us through Jesus Christ. Do we appreciate that those who were not called God’s people before are now declared the children of God in Christ? Jesus elevated Paul to an important role despite the sorrow and trouble he caused the church. Pride has no place in the life of God’s children. Grace brings

out the humility that is seen in true Christians. Grace makes a Christian compassionate. Knowing we did not deserve what is given to us must truly make us humble and compassionate. It should also make us thankful at all times to God and to His son.

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Lagos Ecclesia, Nigeria

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930).

TEACHING AND PREACHING

THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL PREACHING

By Dave Jennings



WE may need to rethink our online communications. In this short article, we will discuss the posting of written and video-based media online and how we might increase our effectiveness.

Over the course of history, there have been technological revolutions that have made a profound impact. The compass for navigation. The printing press. Paper currency. The domestication of the horse. Each led to momentous change in productivity and culture.

The most recent revolution is the Information Age, enabled by digital technology. Digital communications have fundamentally changed the circles of our reach. Today we can speak with anyone, anywhere—whether in real-time or over a period of time. It is as unique of an experience as it was when the electric light bulb began to illuminate homes and businesses.

It is estimated that over four and a half billion people participate in social media today.¹ Because of this, it is likely your own ecclesia has at least dipped its toe into the digital age. Christadelphians are using the Internet and social media to post countless megabytes of content. Bible classes, public addresses, exhortations, musical programs—all being posted to a global audience. We have never been more accessible, and the opportunity to preach has never been greater.

In the time it takes for you to read this article, there will be over thirteen million Facebook posts, 2,000 hours of YouTube content uploaded, and over

600,000 emails sent.² Information today is generated at a rate that no human being can effectively absorb. Access to data, that in years gone by required a trip to the library, now can be obtained 24 hours a day from almost any location.

However, for most men and women, the digital world promises so much and delivers so little. That's because people yearn for real interactions. They are looking for insights, wisdom, not just a dozen opinions or research papers. People come to the "digital continent"³ looking for warmth, accessibility, a transformational experience. Today they often leave with loads of information but feel confused and frequently very lonely.

As we consider how we ought to preach online, there are many important lessons. Our own historical preaching culture has laid out comprehensive but lengthy expositions that build to an important conclusion. This reflects a different audience (one that was largely captive) and a different era. This method is not how people choose to learn today. Studies show that the average reading time for posted content is 1:03 minutes. It is just over two minutes for video-based content.⁴ If we organize material the same way we always have, very few will ever get to our concluding remarks. It requires us to think differently about our message and the structure of what we say.

Trevor Laurence⁵ spoke of three dangers of preaching in a digital age.

One of those was the “pressure of exhaustiveness.” This is the idea that we need to say everything we can, to fully cover the topic. While this was not even possible when we had the luxury of 45-minute Bible talks to a captive audience, it is certainly not possible for the digital visitor with his/her hand ready to click away.

There are some excellent examples of digital preaching going on across Christadelphia. Here’s what they have in common.

- They are short. The best is under two minutes.
- They speak with passion and warmth, encouraging the listener to engage further.
- They offer insight and wisdom, not just information.
- There is an offer to engage further and get more information. But the initial message is designed to capture the importance and impact of the teaching rather than fully describe it.

Let me give you an example. Recently I watched a very impactful video from biblefeed.org. Bro. Dan Weatherall (UK) provided a 1:27-minute talk about why the genealogies of Matthew 1 are important. In that brief message, his warmth and approachability

were apparent. In that short time, he addressed how Jesus was the Seed of David and Abraham, how Jesus was the way the promises would be fulfilled, and how the “messiness” of Jesus’s family tree demonstrates how Jesus cares for those who are flawed but are seeking God. In just over 90 seconds, he communicated all of this. What he provided was just enough to encourage the viewer with an open heart to interact further by viewing a more thorough discussion on the topic.

There certainly is an opportunity for Christadelphians to provide more exhaustive content. We must lead with short, provocative messages which distill why this information is important.

I asked Bro. Art Courtonel (UK) to comment on some of the important learning he has had in more than ten years with the ChristadelphianVideo.org website. During the past decade, this site, and the companion YouTube page, have posted more than 9,500 videos and had over 5.5 million views, which is pretty staggering. So, here’s Bro. Art’s recommendations for the digital preaching your ecclesia may be considering.

Peer Review — Prior to the release of new materials, a peer review will help avoid spelling



errors, but it also provides an opportunity to “fact-check.” We need to be accurate when we cite Scriptures but also when we refer to dates, names and places. We need to be above reproach in what we put online if we want our viewers to trust us.

Avoid Attacking Other Christian Denominations — We should promote what the Bible **does** say, not what it doesn’t. Comments about other denominations make us appear isolationist and often are not fully accurate.

Dress Appropriately — What we wear in online presentations communicates a lot of information about who we are and what we value. Attire itself should not draw attention to us. The audience online is relaxed and casual. Wearing formal attire (e.g., suit and tie) may communicate formality and in some cases, stuffiness. Conversely, wearing casual attire with the iconography of major brands should also be avoided, as we do not want to promote fashion and brands.

Compress Your Message — There are many 40–50-minute Christadelphian gospel addresses

The
window of
opportunity
for preaching
is wide open.

being placed online as the first contact with visitors. Instead, we need more 3–4-minute videos, similar to popular YouTube offerings. These have become the online expectation.

Invest—For your ecclesia to develop an online presence, you’ll need to invest. You’ll need to either utilize internal talent or purchase the expertise. But having an online presence for an ecclesia is increasingly important.

The window of opportunity for preaching is wide open. Sometimes we find ourselves “longing” for the days of Bible seminars, where we filled conference rooms. Those days may be gone, but there is a new opportunity before us. We have such a remarkable message to share, and digital communications can help to remove many of the barriers, if we effectively use it.

The Tidings would appreciate ecclesias sharing their experiences and best practices with us so that we can distribute that knowledge across our community. Please drop us a line at editor@tidings.org.

Dave Jennings

¹ www.statista.com, 2022.

² *Media Use Habits: What, Why, When, and How People Read Online*, Olesya Kukoleva, Anna Preobrazhenskaya, Olga Sidorova, July 24, 2017, www.uxmatters.com.

³ Phrase is taken from *Digital Continent*, Mohammad Amir Amwar and Mark Graham, Oxford Press, February 2022.

⁴ *Ibid*, *Media Use Habits: What, Why, When, and How People Read Online*.

⁵ *3 Dangers of Preaching in a Digital Age*, Trevor Laurence, July 29, 2016, thegospelcoalition.com.

Thoughts on the Way

A City of Refuge

Six of the towns you give the Levites will be cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee... If without hostility someone suddenly shoves another... unintentionally, or... drops a stone on him [unintentionally]... the assembly (the elders of the City of refuge) must judge between him and the avenger of blood. (Num 35:6, 12, 21-24).¹

GOD'S law offered protection to anyone who had harmed another and feared that an aggrieved family member (an avenger of blood) might take revenge for his loss. The Law did not offer absolute protection for the worst of crimes, such as murder. However, it did allow time for the fire of anger and vengeance to exhaust itself while cooler heads inquired into the incident.

Years ago, when I traveled extensively and taught classes at Bible schools and gatherings, I accepted invitations to speak at several functions on another continent. I will not mention which continent it was because, frankly, I don't think it matters. Christadelphians are Christadelphians wherever they are. Likewise, ecclesias are ecclesias wherever they are—with a few exceptions.

While on this continent, I met many gracious, kind, hospitable, and spiritual believers. It was a great privilege to be among them for a few weeks. On these occasions, I spoke before large audiences to which I was not accustomed, but all went well, and I was gratified to be of some comfort to them.

Near the end of my sojourn, my host asked me if I would like to visit one

more ecclesia in the city. Of course, I accepted the opportunity, so that afternoon, we drove through the city, past large meeting halls I had already visited. A while later, we pulled up to a house, not particularly large or imposing but comfortable. Inside, I was introduced to a friendly couple and their family. We sat down in their living room and chatted for a while—during which time several other couples and a few individuals arrived, all bringing various dishes for the kitchen. In Texas, we call that “potluck.”

We ate and talked, alternately, for a while, about Bible topics and families, and other subjects. After dinner and tea and coffee served, my new host asked me if I would like to exhort. I had expected this, and I was prepared, so we had a relevant Bible reading, after which I spoke. The discussion was informal, with anyone, brother or sister, interjecting comments or asking questions. It was comfortable, and I felt right at home. I could have spent much more time in such an environment and with such companions. In fact, my new friends made me homesick for Texas.

After the Breaking of Bread, my guide and I drove back to his home. On the way, I mentioned that it seemed unusual for such a small ecclesia (I

had counted about 20 members) to hold meetings in a private home, considering the large ecclesias within easy driving distance. My friend smiled and said, “We call that ecclesia the City of Refuge.” I did not have to ask him why; it was obvious.

Large ecclesias and medium-sized ones also have their own constitutions and rules and a board of elders, or arranging brothers, who often make policy for everyone else. They often dispense “justice” in one way or another—sometimes leaving no recourse for the “offender,” and no second chance for the “sinner.” This may work well for most ecclesias as a whole but not for every member.

Sometimes ecclesias are run or managed, by a single brother. The Apostle John had experience with one such brother. We get a glimpse of such a situation in 3 John:

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us... Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so [i.e., to welcome the visitors] and puts them out of the church. (vv. 5-10).

In my experience, there are many more well-managed ecclesias than there are poorly managed ones. Nevertheless, there are enough of the latter that we ought to give this some thought. There have been ecclesias where the smallest differences—which Bible translation to use, which interpretation of Revelation to be allowed, and so forth—have led to straight-up disfellowship of some believers, or the more subtle shunning, leaving believers no place to worship.

Considering that such ecclesias exist, maybe there should be more ecclesias like the one I discovered in my continental trip—the sort of ecclesia:

- That accepts believers who, for one reason or another, do not feel comfortable in their previous ecclesias.
- That offers shelter to believers who have been refused by a previous ecclesia.
- That doesn’t question anyone’s point of view about prophecy, or the age of the earth, or the extent of Noah’s flood; and,
- Is willing to give the “sinner” a second chance, and a third, and more.

Maybe every large city with several ecclesias should have its own “City of Refuge,” just in case, with “shepherds” who have watchful eyes for the lost sheep that have been driven away.

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